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VIOLENCE AGAINST GAY [illegible]
'EPIDEMIC OUT OF CONTROL'

NGLTF Report Illuminates Widespread Anti-Lesbian/Gay Violence Throughout the United States

Washington, D.C. -- (March 8, 1994) -- Statistics released today in a report by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) illuminate the dramatic prevalence of hate-violence perpetrated against gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals in the United States.

The 9th annual NGLTF survey, entitled *Anti-Gay/Lesbian Violence, Victimization, & Defamation in 1993*, documents 1,813 anti-gay incidents in six U.S. cities in 1993, including harassment, threats, physical assault, vandalism, arson, police abuse, kidnapping, extortion, and murder. This total, while troubling, represents a welcome 14% decrease in anti-gay incidents over the all-time high of 2,103 incidents reported in Boston, Chicago, Denver, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, and San Francisco during 1992. This figure represents the first annual decline in reported anti-gay incidents after five years of a steady and dramatic rise. While the number of overall incidents fell, the individual incidents in 1993 comprised a higher number o[illegible] incident. Nationwide, the severity of anti-gay incidents rose by 22%, from 1.6 [illegible] incident in 1992 to 1.9.

"While any decline is welcome, it is too early to draw conclusions on wher[illegible]rs indicate a downward trend," said Martin Hiraga, Director of NGLTF's Anti-Violence [illegible] author of the report. "Anti-gay violence is still an epidemic out of control in this country."

In Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, and San Francisco cities recording anti-gay violence since 1988, anti-gay incidents increased 127% over the s[illegible] period, from 697 incidents in 1988 to 1,584.

The highest number of anti-gay episodes were recorded in New York City (587), followed by San Francisco (366), Minneapolis/St. Paul (240), Denver (229), Chicago (204), and Boston (187). Because of under-reporting by victims, it is estimated that these figures reflect only a fraction of the actual number of incidents that occurred in the six urban areas last year. Evidence in this report shows that in one community a significant percentage of victims did not report their incidents because they fear public disclosure of their sexual orientation.

"The numbers reported continue to be represent only the tip of the iceberg," said Hiraga.

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Anti-gay arson was the most serious form of offense to increase this year. Arson rose 200% from 2 incidents in 1992 to 6 in 1993. Vandalism also rose 10% from 141 incidents in 1992 to 155 in 1993. Bomb threats increased 8% from 13 incidents in 1992 to 14 in 1993. Harassment—personalized, confrontational incidents in which lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are intimidated face-to-face, on the phone or by mail—rose 35% from 1230 incidents in 1992 to 1665 in 1993.

Reports of threats and menacing dropped 9% from 667 incidents to 605. Physical assaults, or gay-bashing, fell 16% in the six cities from 848 incidents in 1992 to 710 in 1993. Robberies declined 28% from 85 to 61. Reports of police abuse dipped 36% from 248 to 161. Anti-gay murders fell 50% from 14 to 7. Murders in which the victim's sexual orientation was one of several factors declined 25% from 24 to 18.

Only 322 anti-gay crimes were reported to local police in six cities. Police reports declined 14% in 1993 from 375 crimes in 1992.

The decline in anti-gay episodes could reflect a variety of factors, according to Hiraga. These include increased outreach by lesbian, gay, and bisexual crime prevention education programs, greater vigilance against anti-gay violence by local law enforcement officials, and enhanced penalties in local hate crime statutes. However, these figures also indicate that homophobic violence remained an on-going and prevalent problem in the six urban areas during the past year.

Intolerance fomented by Far Right operatives may have contributed to anti-gay violence in many communities. For example, Denver victim advocates documented a 12% surge in homophobic incidents during 1993 in the wake of the passage of Amendment 2, an anti-gay ballot initiative in Colorado. In 1992, Denver advocates received 41% of the year's reports in November and December, after the initiative passed. The number of anti-gay incidents remained high through the first months of 1993. After a series of Colorado state court decisions invalidated Amendment 2, anti-gay incidents declined to their pre-1992 levels.

New York City advocates also noted a surge in anti-gay incidents at the beginning of 1993 after a very visible Far Right campaign to remove any mention of lesbian, gay, and bisexual families from a local school curriculum. Anti-gay incidents also increased in other communities especially when there was greater local lesbian, gay, and bisexual visibility and an accompanying Far Right backlash. For example, victim advocates in Washington, DC noted an unusual rise in homophobic episodes in the weeks before and after the April 25 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Equal Rights and Liberation.

"When individual communities face local anti-gay battles, violence rises," stated Hiraga.

Additionally, in 1993, reports in the mainstream press of anti-gay murders outside of the communities in this report soared. (For examples, see Murders on pg. 19.) The Klanwatch project of the Southern Poverty Law Center noted that reports there of homophobic murders doubled in 1993. A surge in such disturbing reports may indicate a surge of other kinds of homophobic victimization in places with few, if any, resources for lesbian, gay or bisexual victims of hate crime.

Prevalence studies

Data compiled by local anti-violence projects and by the police account for only a fraction of anti-gay episodes that actually occur. More accurate, and more disturbing are prevalence studies that question individuals directly about victimization they have experienced.

Fourteen percent of the men and 9% of the women questioned in a St. Louis, Missouri survey said they have been punched, hit, kicked or beaten in an anti-gay incident. Interestingly, 18% of the women

and 9% of the men said they did not report such incidents to the police because they feared public disclosure of their sexual orientations. Missouri is a state targeted by the Far Right for an initiative to ban protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Another 10% of the women and 12% of the men did not report bias violence because they expected the police to be hostile towards them.

The Lesbian and Gay Community Association of Jacksonville, Florida surveys lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals every year. They note that the percentage of those who indicate that they have been harassed in the previous year has risen from 33% in 1990 to 41% in 1993. In 1990, 3% of those surveyed said they had been physically assaulted for their sexual orientations while in 1993, 5% said they had.

Examples of Anti-Gay Violence and Victimization in 1993

A wide variety of anti-gay incidents were reported to NGLTF from across the U.S. in 1993, including the following:

- On January 7, a Latina woman leaving a Washington, DC gay bar was accosted by a man who crudely described how he would make her have sex with him. The man shot her point blank in the face, killing her.

- A teenager dragged a 55-year-old Vietnamese man to the rocks on Laguna Beach (California), kicked him with steel-toed boots and beat him unconscious on January 9. The teen admitted driving to Laguna Beach looking for gay people to harass.

- The Tampa, Florida home of an HIV-positive lesbian AIDS activist was burned to the ground on April 24, while she attended a national march for gay rights. The activist received numerous threatening phone calls prior to the arson.

- Oregon Citizens Alliance supporters distributed a flyer in the Salem, Oregon public library in early 1993 calling for the execution, castration, and imprisonment of lesbians and gay men. The flyer called on its readers to demonstrate their "love" for gay men by slashing their throats and bleeding them to death.

- Two men who admitted stalking "faggots" shot a gay man and robbed him of his wallet when he stopped to help them with their car in Wichita, Kansas on January 12. The shooting left the man a quadriplegic.

- A man hiding in the back seat of a car forced a lesbian to drive to a field near Woodhaven, Michigan, and raped her on October 14. During the attack, the man said, "This should teach you not be a queer...It's wrong...This is what you need."

- Seventy skinheads and neo-Nazis held a rally called "Gay Bash '93" in a state park near New Hope, Pennsylvania on November 6.

- Three men forced a gay man into a car at gun point in Tyler, Texas, drove him ten miles away, and shot him at least 15 times, killing him on December 2. The three men boasted that they had assaulted and robbed several other gay men .

- A woman who dressed, acted, and talked like a man, and who dated women, was murdered on December 31 in Humboldt, Nebraska. One of the men charged with her murder stripped her in public on December 24 to prove she was a woman, then kidnapped, and raped her.

ANTI-GAY VIOLENCE 4-4-4-4-4

Violence and the Far Right

After the passage of Colorado's Amendment 2, an anti-gay ballot initiative, Far Right groups waged and won campaigns for similar initiatives on the ballot in Cincinnati, Ohio; Lewiston, Maine; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and several cities and counties in Oregon. Initiative backers in all four campaigns asserted that the initiatives sought only to prevent lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals from gaining "special rights" and "protected minority status." Despite claims of not being "anti-gay" per se, initiative backers blanketed communities with homophobic distortions, half-truths, and lies. Far Right operatives circulated literature and videos that portrayed lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals as degenerate, privileged, sexually perverse, and subhuman.

So far in 1994, Far Right organizations have filed language for anti-gay ballot initiatives in 7 states—Idaho, Oregon, Arizona, Missouri, Michigan, Washington, and Nevada. Several of these states have at least two things in common with the 1993 campaign sites—a lack of anti-violence resources and well-established neo-Nazi and white supremacist bases of activity. The 1992 experience in Colorado and Oregon demonstrated that anti-gay ballot initiatives foster intolerance and harassment—unless community leaders, public, and church officials, and citizens of conscience decry the prejudice, hate mongering, and discrimination advocated by the Far Right.

Government and Community Action in 1993

In 1993, progress in countering hate violence at the Federal, state, and local levels leapt forward. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that states may enhance penalties for hate crimes when it is proven that the assailants chose their victims because of their race, religion, sexual orientation or other target status (*Wisconsin v. Mitchell*).

After the Supreme Court's decision, the Federal Hate Crime Sentencing Enhancement Act was introduced and passed in the House of Representatives. The Act was introduced as an amendment to the omnibus Crime Bill in the Senate and passed as well. The Senate version awaits passage of the full bill.

The states of Washington and Texas both enacted hate crime penalty enhancement laws that include sexual orientation bias. The state of South Carolina ordered its law enforcement agencies to begin collecting data on hate crimes against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

Recommendations

The NGLTF Policy Institute recommendations for action against anti-gay violence include:

- Passage of The Hate Crime Sentencing Enhancement Act.
- Re-authorization and increased funding for implementation of the Hate Crime Statistics Act and other measures to counter hate crimes;
- Immediate passage of state and local laws to curb anti-gay violence and other bias crimes;
- Passage of local, state, and federal laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and prompt repeal of laws that seek to regulate private, consenting sexual behavior among adults;
- Immediate repeal of state and local laws banning protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation;
- Mandatory training programs for all law enforcement personnel to ensure competent and sensitive handling of bias crimes;
- Required educational programs in the schools, churches, and wider community to counteract anti-gay prejudice and all other forms of intolerance, and;
- Vigorous condemnation of anti-gay prejudice and violence by leaders in government, religion, education, business, and the media.